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REMARKS ON THE CONSTRUCTION, EVOLUTION AND USE OF THE WAR SADDLE IN LATE MEDIEVAL POLAND

In Polish arms and armour research, finds connected with horse harness and accessories have not won great popularity with scholars. Regrettably, as a result, the number of hitherto made studies and edited publications cannot be considered as satisfactory.

Although several works dealing with particular components of horse harness and accessories have been published, not all its parts have thoroughly been examined¹.

¹ Z. Hilcerówna, 1956, *Ostrogi polskie z X–XII wieku*, Poznań 1956; Z. Żygulski Jr., *Ze studiów nad dawną sztuką siodlarską*, „Rozprawy i Sprawozdania Muzeum Narodowego w Krakowie”, Kraków 1959; A. Nowakowski, *W sprawie datowania ostróg z gwiaździstym bodźcem*, „Acta Universitatis Lodziana, Nauki humanistyczne – społeczne” series I, fascicle 2 (1976), pp. 75 – 82; J. Kaźmierczyk, *Podkowy na Śląsku w X–XIV wieku (studia z dziejów kultury materialnej)*, Wrocław – Warszawa – Kraków – Gdańsk 1978; Z. Wawrzonowska, *Okrycie konia rycerskiego w Polsce do końca XV wieku w ikonografii*, „Biuletyn Historii Sztuki”, Yearbook 40, No. 4 (1978), pp. 24 – 48; S. Kołodziejski, *Średniowieczne ostrogi z gwiaździstym bodźcem z terenu Małopolski*, „Sprawozdania z Posiedzeń Komisji Naukowych, PAN Oddział w Krakowie”, Vol. XXV, fascicle 1 (1981), pp. 68 – 94; A. R. Chodyński, *Kagańce końskie*, Malbork 1986; W. Świętosławski, *Strzemiona średniowieczne z ziem polskich*, Łódź 1990. Among the few synthetic works see: J. Tulisow, *Rycerski rząd koński w Polsce średniowiecznej*, „Kościński”, Yearbook 5 (1970), No. 3, pp. 48 – 49; No. 4, pp. 45 – 46; R. Wagner, *Wpływ szkół jeździeckich na budowę rządu końskiego w Polsce*, „Roczniki Nauk Rolniczych, Seria D – Monografie”, vol. 194, Warszawa 1986; J. Puchalska, *Rząd konia rycerskiego w okresie średniowiecza na terenie Polski*, „Muzealnictwo Wojskowe”, No. 4 (1989), pp. 378 – 410, as well as monographs found in publications on Polish arms and armour: Z. Wawrzonowska, *Rząd koński i oporządzenie jeździeckie*, [in:] *Uzbrojenie w Polsce średniowiecznej 1350 – 1450*, ed. A. Nadolski, Łódź 1990 (further quoted as UwPŚ I) (1990), pp. 179 – 195; A. R. Chodyński, *Konie i rządy jeździeckie w średniowieczu i czasach nowożytnych (Zagadnienia wybrane)*, [in:] ed. A. R. Chodyński, *Militaria malborskie*, Malbork 1991, pp. 1 – 36; W. Świętosławski, *Zbroja, rząd koński i oporządzenie jeździeckie*, [in:] ed. A. Nowakowski, *Uzbrojenie w Polsce średniowiecznej 1450 – 1500*, Toruń 1998,

The aim of the present paper is to collect and analyze relevant source information referring to an important and, in truth, indispensable component of horse harness, the saddle. The subject of our discussion will be limited to the kind of saddle termed the ‘war’ saddle, used by warriors on the battlefield. The term *knightly* might seem more appropriate here. However, as the semantic range of the word *knight* has never been clearly specified in the Polish language, the term war saddle is regarded as more accurate².

The chronological and territorial frame of the paper has been defined in accordance with the rule adopted in the Polish scientific literature on arms and armour³.

pp. 106 – 117 (further quoted as UwPŚ II), as well as in other archaeological and historical works: J. Szymczak, *Koń wyniósł jeźdźca ponad innych wojowników*, [in:] ed. W. Peltz, J. Dudek, *Etos rycerski w Europie Środkowej i wschodniej od X do XV wieku*, Zielona Góra 1997, pp. 15 – 24; A. Chęć, *Holdowla koni w komturii malborskiej*, „Archaeologia Historica Polona”, vol. 15/2 (2005), Toruń, pp. 359 – 369.

² Cf., among others,: K. Buczek, *O tak zwanym rittermeszig man i o „gościu” w najstarszym spisie prawa polskiego*, „Czasopismo Prawno – Historyczne”, vol. XII (1960), p. 141; by the same author, *Prawo rycerskie i powstanie stanu szlacheckiego w Polsce*, „Przegląd Historyczny”, vol. LXIX (1978), fascicle. 1, pp. 36 – 62; A. Nadolski, J. Dankowa, *Uwagi o składzie i uzbrojeniu polskiej jazdy rycerskiej w latach 1350 – 1450*, „Studia i Materiały do Historii Wojskowości”, 1983, vol. 26, pp. 91 – 110; J. Bieniak, *Tytuł rycerski jako kryterium identyfikacji osób w średniowieczu*, [in:] ed. J. Bieniak, R. Kabacinski, J. Pakulski, S. Trawkowski, *Personae – colligationes – facta*, Toruń 1991, pp. 67 – 68; A. Bogucki, *„Strennus” jako tytuł polskich rycerzy pasowanych (XIII – XV w.)*, „Przegląd Historyczny” vol. 77 (1986), fascicle. 4, pp. 625 – 629; by the same author, *Jeszcze o tak zwanym rittermeszig man w Księżce elbląskiej*, [in:] ed. S. Kuczyński, *Spółeczeństwo Polski średniowiecznej*, vol. 5, Warszawa 1994, pp. 124 – 135; by the same author, *Rycerz i panosza w źródłach polskich XIV i XV wieku*, [in:] ed. S. Kuczyński, *Spółeczeństwo Polski średniowiecznej*, vol. 7, Warszawa 1996, pp. 165 – 200; by the same author, *Polskie nazwy rycerstwa w średniowieczu. Przyczynki do historii ustroju społecznego*, Włocławek 2001.

³ A. Nadolski, *Wstęp*, [in:] UwPŚ I (1990), p. 9.

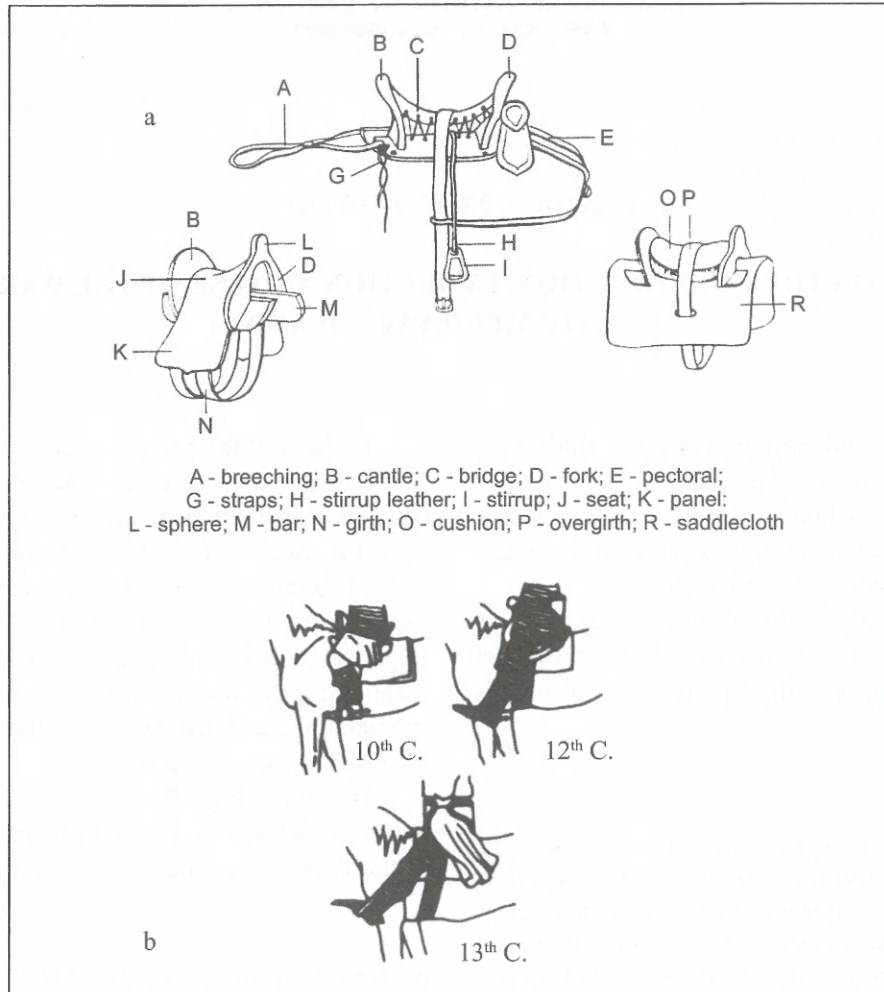


Fig. 1. a – Structure of a saddle (after M. Gradowski, Z. Żygulski, Jr., *Słownik uzbrojenia historycznego* (A Dictionary of Historical Arms and Armour), Warsaw 2000. b – Reconstruction of the seat in successive centuries (after A. Nowakowski, *Uzbrojenie średniowieczne w Polsce (na tle środkowoeuropejskim)* (Medieval Arms and Armour in Poland (Against a Central European Background)), Toruń 1991.

Thus, the period between the years 1350 and 1500 will be referred to as the Late Middle Ages and the term *Poland* will be used to denote the territory of the contemporary Kingdom of Poland.

Regrettably, the source base of our discussion regarding archaeological finds is not particularly rich. We have at our disposal only two relics dating from the period in question: a fifteenth-century saddle kept at the Sport and Tourism Museum in Warsaw (Wagner 1986, p. 20, fig. 10) and another saddle, tentatively dated to the turn of the 15th century, kept at the National Museum in Cracow⁴. Probably, a certain number of finds,

mostly metal parts of saddles, termed ‘unidentified objects’, are stored in the warehouses of various archaeological institutions. However, to find and identify them seems to be an almost unfeasible task at the moment.

On the other hand, mentions of saddles are frequently found in medieval written records. For this reason, we shall consider them the main source of knowledge. Besides, iconographic representations constitute a useful source base, providing information on the appearance of saddles, sometimes their constructional details and most importantly the seat. Thus, the author will also refer to them in the present paper.

In the Middle Ages, changes in the seat, the development of the saddle as well as subsequent modifications made to it were connected with the evolution of other components of contemporary arms and armour, particularly offensive kinds of weapons (Fig. 1: b). The fundamental development was the appearance of lancers, a military formation composed of warriors armed with long pole weapons, used mainly during the initial

⁴ I would like to thank Eugeniusz Nowak MA and M. Dziewulski MA from the National Museum in Cracow for making it possible for me to examine the find. It may only be noted that the opinions formed in the paper are tentative conclusions. A thorough monograph will be published separately after the relevant research has been completed.

phases of an encounter. The introduction of swords also played an important part in the process. New and new shapes of the weapon had to be invented to pierce the constantly improved armour of the opponents. As a result, swords were adapted for use as piercing weapons. Both their weight and size were increased in order to achieve greater striking force.

The need for warriors to use a long and relatively heavy lance, the necessity to work a sword skillfully as well as to move freely in plate armour made constructors invent a way of providing the rider with a secure support holding his body firmly in position on the back of the horse.

In medieval Europe, contemporary Poland included, two basic types of saddle, referred to as the 'eastern' and 'western' saddle in the present-day literature, were in use. The former was made from two wooden bars running parallel along the horse's back, to which the fork and the cantle were fastened at the front and the rear (all the components of a saddle as well as relevant terminology are shown in Fig. 1: a). Such saddles, undoubtedly of eastern provenance, were dominant ones in Polish lands in the Early Middle Ages. Surprisingly, they never went out of use completely and 'eastern' saddles were still valued by Polish riders in later periods⁵.

The period discussed here is the time when the 'western' saddle, developed and popularized in medieval, Latin Europe, came into widespread use in Polish territory⁶. This type of saddle is characterized by the use of a saddletree as the basic supportive part on which the fork and cantle, attached perpendicularly to the line of the horse's spine, rest. Because the gravitational forces were distributed mainly between the fork and the cantle, to avoid injuring the horse, the undersides of saddles were sometimes additionally equipped with a lining, which carried some of the rider's weight and prevented excessive pressure in the places where the fork and cantle touched the horse's back⁷. Another way of preventing skin damage was overlaying the underside of a saddle with birch, aspen or elm tree bark so as to prevent the animal's sweat from permeating through the saddle, which in turn reduced the risk of the appearance of chafed areas on its skin⁸.

It is difficult to say which type of saddle, the 'eastern' or the 'western' variety, was more popular with Polish riders. A shortage of archeological finds renders the question almost unanswerable. No definite conclusions

⁵ Z. Wawrzonowska, *Rząd koński...*, p. 183; W. Świętosławski, *Zbroja...*, p. 112.

⁶ W. Świętosławski, *Zbroja...*, p. 113.

⁷ Z. Wawrzonowska, *Rząd koński...*, p. 184.

⁸ Z. Wawrzonowska, *Rząd koński...*, p. 184; W. Świętosławski, *Zbroja...*, p. 113.

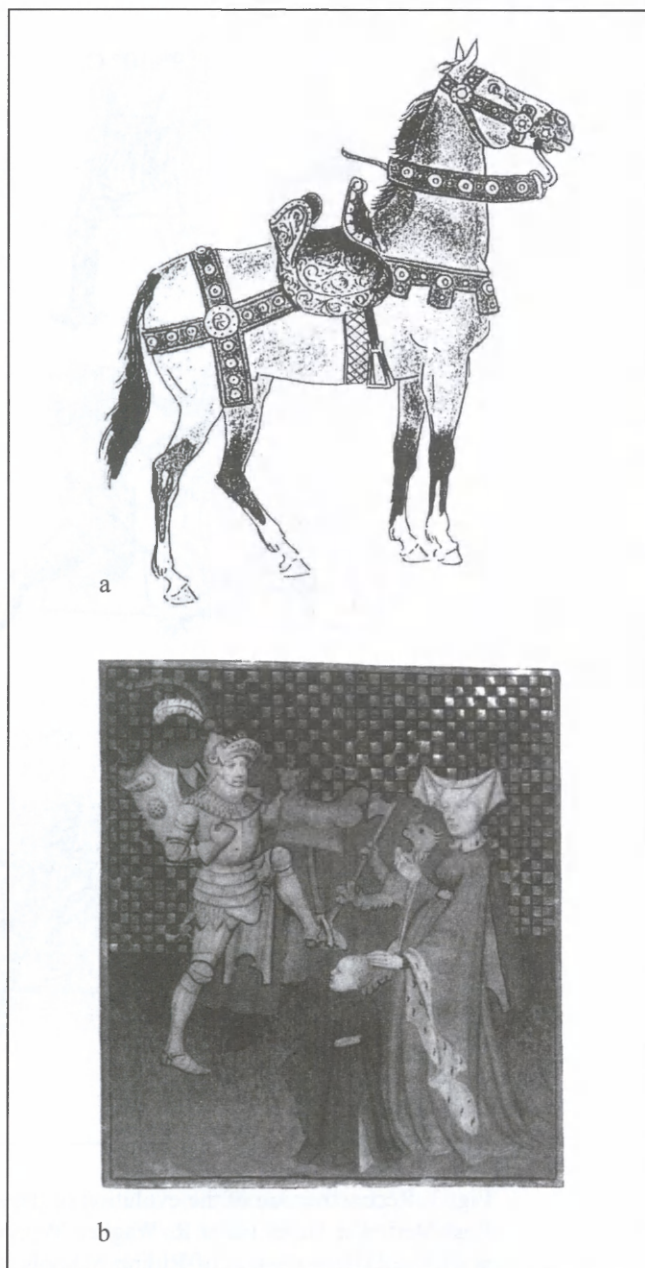


Fig. 2. a – Saddle depicted in the painting 'Crucifixion' by Giovanni de Almaguita (after E. Wagner, Z. Drobna, J. Durdik, Kroje, zbroj a zbraňe doby předhusitské, Prague 1956) b – Knight setting off for a war expedition (after R. Barber, *Rycerze i rycerskość (Knights and Chivalry)* Warsaw 2000)

can be formed by analysing the iconographic material either. The majority of representations show only the fork and cantle while the 'supportive' part of the saddle depicted is concealed beneath the saddle panels (?) and jockeys (housings). Most probably, the choice of a given type of saddle was a matter of personal preference. The decision may have resulted from the rider's, and possibly the horse's, likes and dislikes. It can be assumed tentatively that 'western' saddles were used on the battlefield, though a number of iconographic representations depict horses setting off for war, equipped with 'eastern' type saddles (Fig. 2: b).

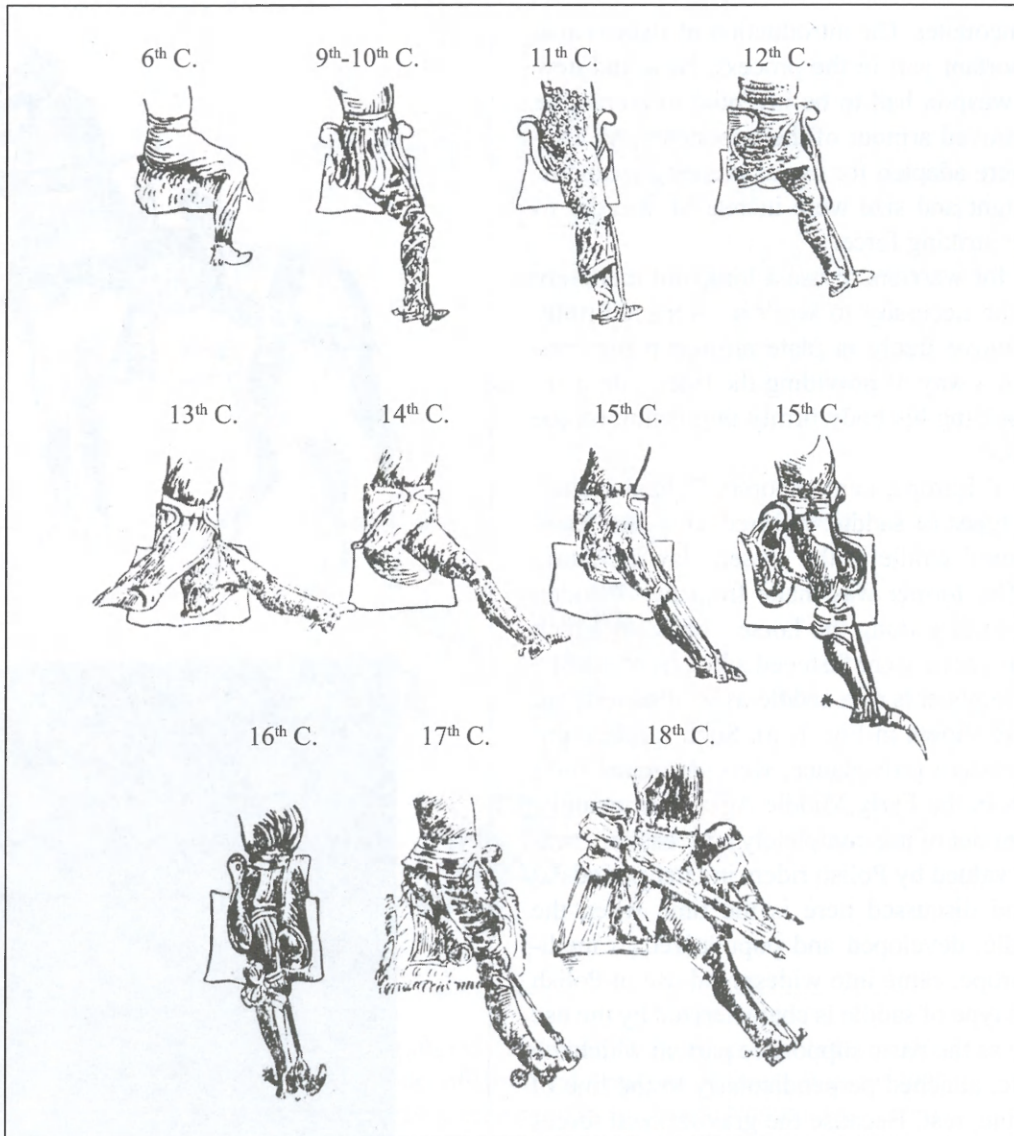


Fig. 3. Reconstruction of the evolution of the saddle and the seat from the Early Middle Ages to Post-Medieval Times (after R. Wagner, *Wpływ szkół jeździeckich na budowę rzędu końskiego w Polsce* (The Influence of Riding Schools on the Construction of Horse Harness in Poland), *‘Rocznik Nauk Rolniczych, Seria D – Monografie*, vol. 194, Warsaw 1986.

Besides the type of saddle, the evolution of the war saddle was characterized by a tendency to ‘close’ the rider between the fork and the cantle (Fig. 3). As a result, the height of these parts of a saddle increased, and above all, their upper edges were lengthened and bent towards the centre of the saddle. Most probably, saddles with higher forks and cantles first appeared in the 11th century. However, at that time, their upper edges were bent outwards, which facilitated free movements of the rider, fighting with a spear, held in his free hand, a sword or an axe. Construction of this type held the warrior in a relatively firm position, provided him with support and made it easier for him to stay in the saddle. Numerous instances of saddles with their forks and cantles shaped in this way are to be seen in the Bayeux Tapestry (Fig. 4: a-d). During the subsequent, 12th and 13th, centuries the cantle was heightened and clearly bent, while the fork still

slightly slanted forwards. The process of bending this part of the saddle and the progressing modification of the cantle, which finally became shaped like the letter U or Y (Fig. 4, e-f), started to be visible in the 14th century and reached a climax in the 15th century. The cantle used to be reinforced by adding special, usually metal, supports, which strengthened the structure by receiving most of the striking force if the rider sitting in the saddle was hit with a lance. Saddles of the western type with clearly bent forks and cantles, in their lower parts binding the horse’s back, are referred to as ‘lancer’s’ saddles in the scientific literature (Fig. 5: c-d)⁹.

In addition to saddles with clearly bent forks and cantles, knights kept using saddles with a strongly

⁹ W. Świętosławski, *Zbroja...*, p. 113.

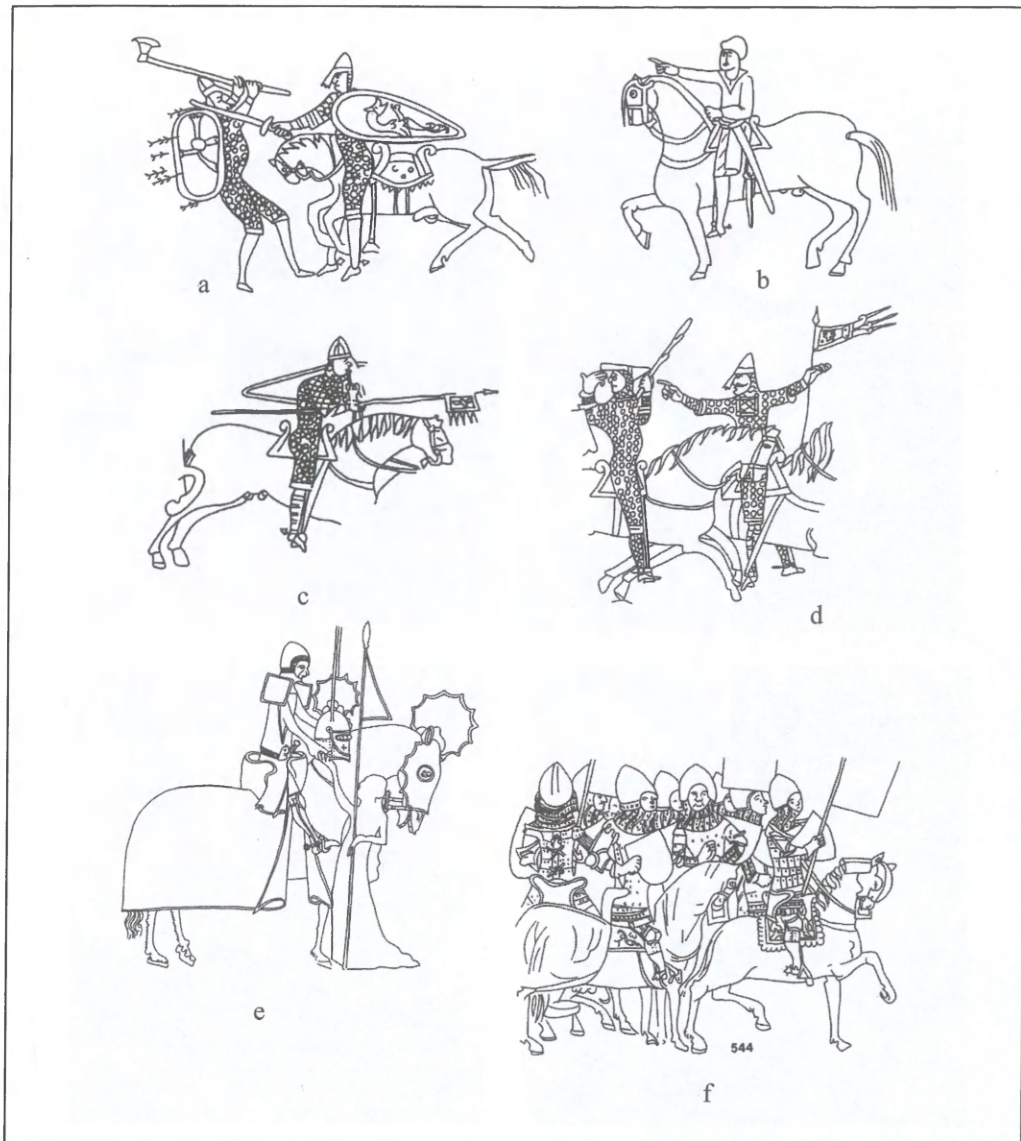


Fig. 4. a-d – Saddles depicted in the Bayeux Tapestry (after D.C. Nicolle, *Arms and Armour of the Crusading Era 1050-1350*, New York 1988), e – Sir Geoffrey Luttrell (after D.C. Nicolle, *Arms and Armour of the Crusading Era 1050-1350*, New York 1988), f – Saddles depicted in the ‘Romance of Alexander (1338-1344) (after D.C. Nicolle, *Arms and Armour of the Crusading Era 1050-1350*, New York 1988)

profiled fork, placed vertically or even slightly bent towards the front. It seems that the choice of the shape of the fork was a matter of personal preference. Analysis of the source material, especially the iconographic representations, suggests that 14th-15th-century knights preferred ‘traditional’ saddles with their forks only slightly bent backwards (Fig. 6: a-f; Fig. 7: a-d). This phenomenon may have been a result of the fact that free movements and unrestrained use of weapons were more important to them than safety and the secure seat.

‘First shall my said horse... be saddled with a saddle whose pommel and cantle are of wood, garnished with bound horn, and garnished in iron and steel, or in one of these two, and ribbed and glued, the pommel and cantle high in front and back and open at the sides as they should be, garnished and covered with

leather, linen, or light silk, studded and garnished with iron, steel or other metal, gilt or tinned,’ said the Breton knight de Tornemine in 1386¹⁰.

Saddles with the fork and cantle ‘properly’ open at both sides are frequently depicted in iconography from Polish lands. They first appeared in the 12th century and remained in use to the close of the Middle Ages. Such saddles are visible in the earliest horse seal from Polish territory, the seal of Mieszko the Old, dated to the 12th century (Fig. 8: a)¹¹, a later seal of Boleslaw the Shy,

¹⁰ After: A. Hyland, *The Warhorse 1250 – 1600*, Phoenix Mill – Stroud – Gloucestershire 1988, p. 7.

¹¹ Z. Piech, *Ikonaografia pieczęci Piastów*, Kraków 1993, p. 204, catalogue no.7.



Fig. 5. a – St George (after M. Walicki, *Malarstwo polskie. Gotyk, renesans, wczesny manieryzm* (Polish Painting. Gothic, the Renaissance, Early Manierism), Warsaw 1963, b – St Martin (after M. Walicki, *Malarstwo polskie. Gotyk, renesans, wczesny manieryzm* (Polish Painting. Gothic, the Renaissance, Early Manierism), Warsaw 1963, c-d – Fragments of the painting ‘Battle of Orsza’ (after M. Walicki, *Malarstwo polskie. Gotyk, renesans, wczesny manieryzm* (Polish Painting. Gothic, the Renaissance, Early Manierism), Warsaw 1963

dating back to the year 1235 (Fig. 8: b)¹², and finally in the coat of arms used by Lithuania, a knight and horse (Pogoń), represented on the tomb of Casimir Jagiellonian around 1492 (Fig. 8: c)¹³.

Undoubtedly, the fork and cantle holding the bridge-seat at the front and in the back were the dominant parts of a saddle. The upper edge of the fork was frequently ornamented and for this reason such saddles were referred to as saddles ‘*cum capite*’ or ‘with a sphere’

(Fig. 6: e; Fig. 5: a; Fig. 2: a)¹⁴. Depictions of such seats reveal a great variety of decorative patterns and designs from tiny volutes to more advanced forms of fantastic shapes. Thus forks did not perform only a practical function, serving as a support for the rider sitting in the saddle, but the ornamentation was also a manifestation of the owner’s artistic tastes and preferences.

¹² Ibidem, p. 203, nr kat. 5.

¹³ P. Mrozowski, *Polskie nagrobki gotyckie*, Warszawa 1994, p. 181, catalogue no. I 31.

¹⁴ J. Szymczak, *Organizacja produkcji i ceny uzbrojenia*, [in:] *UwPŚ I*, pp. 208 – 383; M. Gradowski, Z. Żygulski Z., *Słownik polskiej terminologii uzbrojenia historycznego*, Warszawa 1982, p. 156

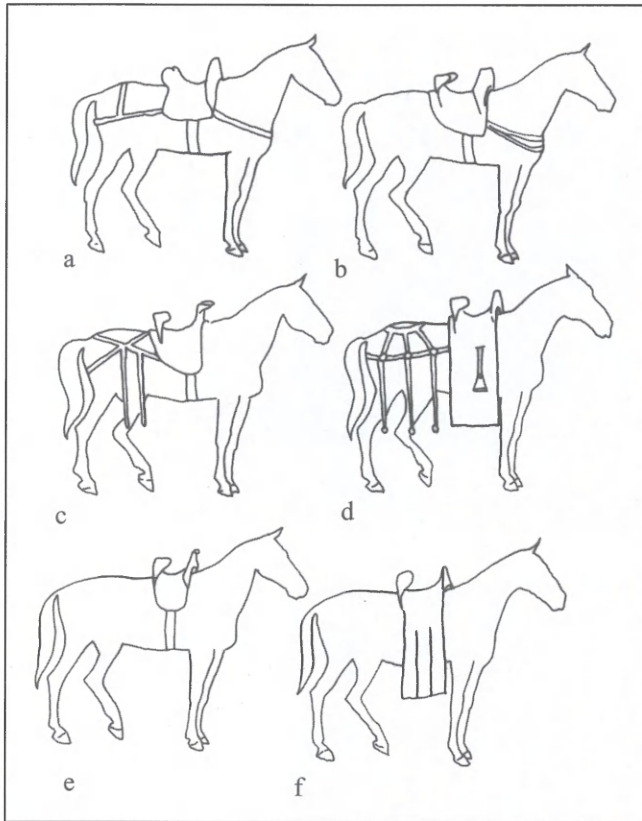
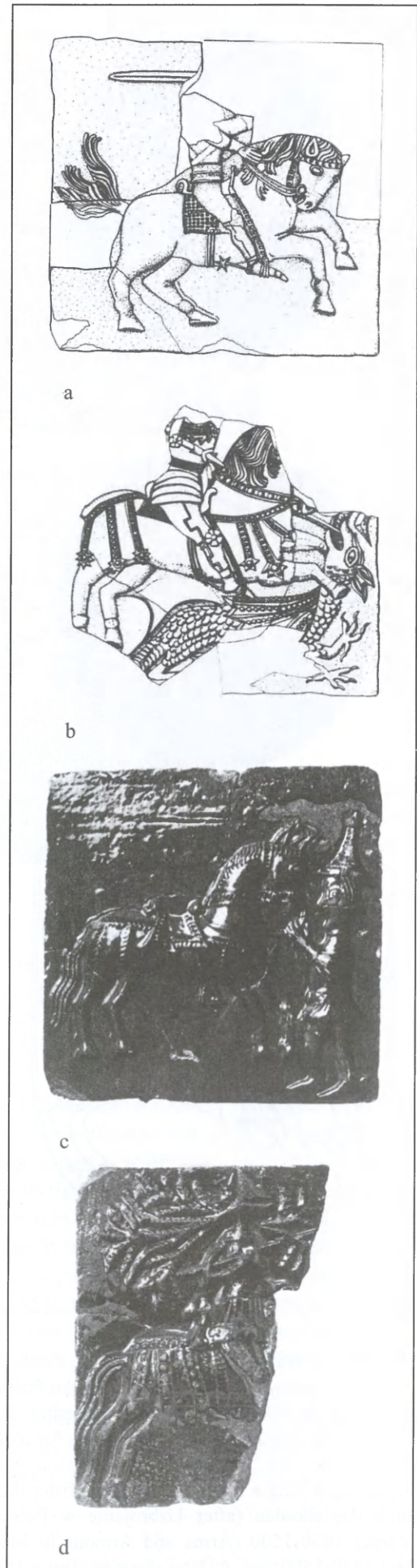


Fig. 6. a-f – Saddles depicted in King Waclaw's Bible (after E. Wagner, Z. Drobna, J. Durdik, Kroje, zbroj a zbrańe doby predhusitské, Prague 1956)

Fig. 7. a-d – Saddles depicted in 15th-century tiles from Gniezno (after T. Janiak, Kafle gotyckie w zbiorach Muzeum Początków Państwa Polskiego w Gnieźnie (Gothic Tiles in the Collections of the Beginnings of the Polish State Museum in Gniezno), Gniezno 2003)

As was stated above, the fork and especially the cantle of a lancer's saddle were additionally equipped with some strengthening parts in order to increase their durability and resilience. The saddle from the Sport and Tourism Museum in Warsaw has such components. Its cantle is reinforced with a pair of crossed, arch-shaped, metal bars half their length decorated with thickenings. One end of such a 'trestle' supports the vertical plane of the cantle and the other one is attached to its horizontal part, resting on the back of the horse. No clear representations of this type of saddle can be found in Polish iconography. Numerous instances, however, are known from West-European depictions and the above observations have been confirmed by archaeological finds discovered outside Poland. The second saddle kept in Polish collections, the specimen from The National Museum in Cracow, has no reinforcing components preserved. However, some openings which, if necessary, could be used for attaching the bars strengthening the cantle can be seen in the lower sections of both its back arches and in the cantle.



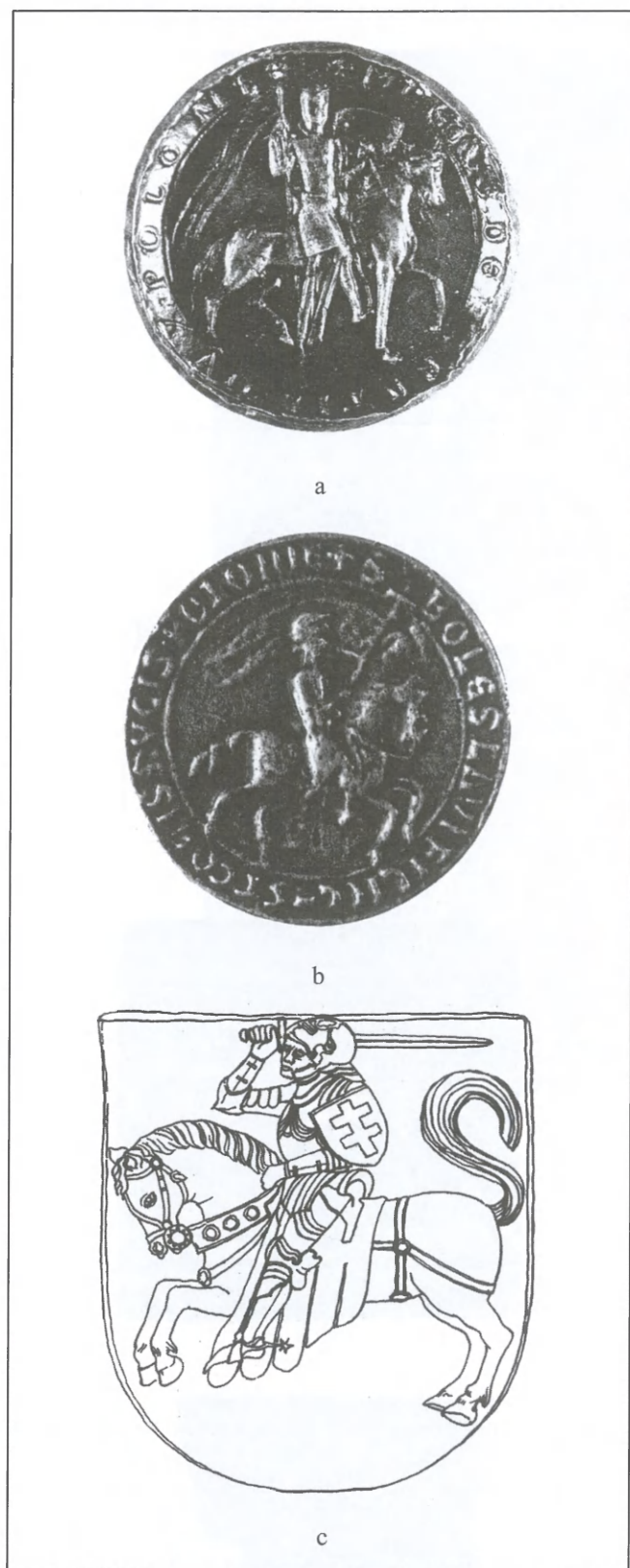


Fig. 8. a – Seal of Mieszko the Old (after Z. Piech, *IkonoGRAFIA pieczęci Piastów* (An Iconography of the Polish Piasts' Seals), Cracow 1993), b – Seal of Bolesław the Shy (after Z. Piech, *IkonoGRAFIA pieczęci Piastów* (An Iconography of the Polish Piasts' Seals), Cracow 1993), c – Coat of arms displaying a knight and horse (Pogoń) from the tomb of Casimir Jagiellonian (after *Uzbrojenie w Polsce średniowiecznej 1450-1500* (Arms and Armour in Medieval Poland 1450-1500), ed. A. Nowakowski, Torun 1998.

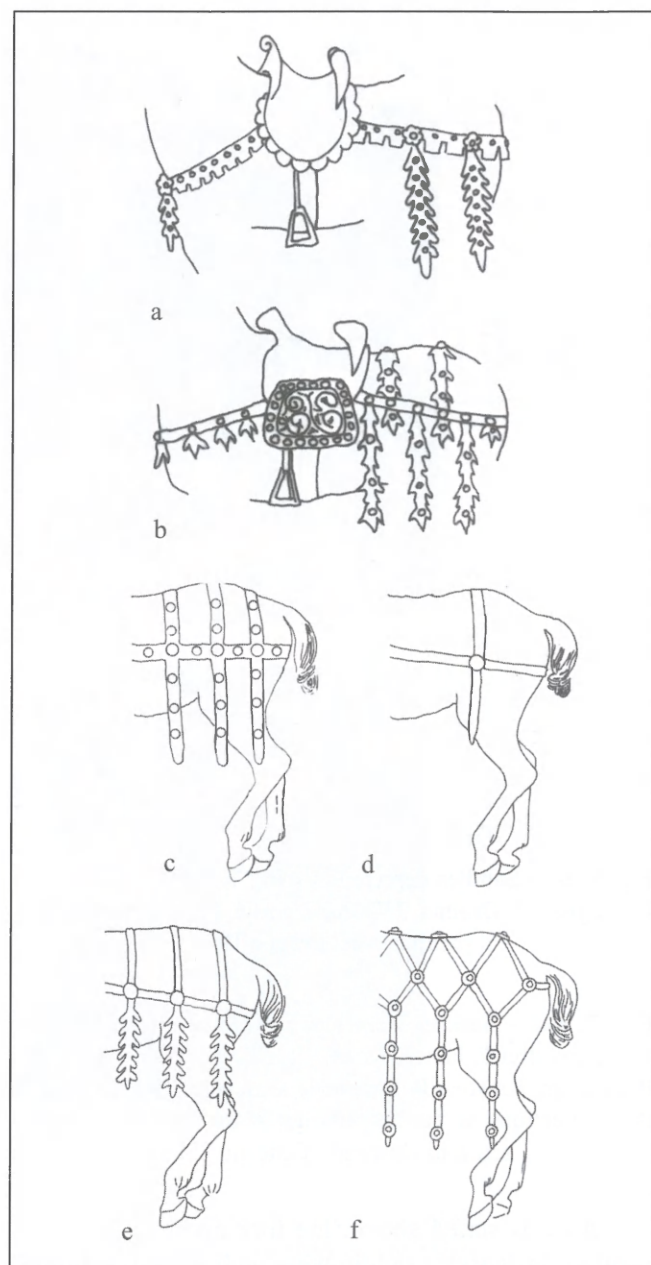


Fig. 9. a-b – Breast straps (according to E. Wagner, Z. Drobna, J. Durdik, *Kroje, zbroj a zbrańe doby předhusitské*, Prague 1956, c-f – Breechings (according to E. Wagner, Z. Drobna, J. Durdik, *Kroje, zbroj a zbrańe doby předhusitské*, Prague 1956

A cushion, in written records referred to as '*cussin*' or '*kussathel*', was sometimes placed on the seat of a saddle¹⁵. It may be assumed that some types of saddle did not require a cushion because '*cały wierzch [był] miękko włosiem końskim wystłany i sukmem powleczoney*' ('the whole surface area [was] covered with horsehair and upholstered in woolen cloth')¹⁶. Such cushions

¹⁵ J. Szymczak, *Organizacja...*, pp. 319, 321.

¹⁶ J. Kitowicz, *Opis obyczajów za panowania Augusta III*, vol. II, Wrocław 2003, p. 302.



Fig. 10. a-d – Saddles depicted in the Codex Manesse (the scans come from Codex Manesse – die große Heidelberger Liederhandschrift. Vollständiges Faksimile des Codex Palatinus Germanicus 848 der Universitätsbibliothek Heidelberg. Frankfurt on the Main, 1975-1981)

were commonly made of leather and filled with cattle hair, deer hair, horsehair, feathers and even hay. The use of cushions seems to be confirmed by the presence of special straps, called the overgirth, used for fixing them to the saddle, which are depicted in iconographic representations. The overgirth ran under the horse's stomach, next to the girth, and its upper part held the cushion firmly in position in the seat¹⁷. It remains unclear whether such cushions attached to the saddle by means of a strap were the only padding or only an additional accessory designed for comfort.

Another component of a saddle is the jockeys and panels. These parts are semicircular or rectangular pieces of leather or fabric used for

protecting the horse's sides from abrasions. The jockeys are attached to the seat (Fig. 9: b) and the panels are its integral part (Fig. 9: a)¹⁸.

Both the above-mentioned saddle components are to be seen in the finds from Polish collections - the saddle from Warsaw is equipped with panels and the relic from Cracow has leather jockeys topped with suede and fixed to the seat with leather straps.

The saddle was attached to the horse's back by means of a girth – a strap made of leather or fabric binding the horse's body. Some girths were made from a single strap, others, composed of two or three straps, were more complex in construction (Fig. 10: a-c). Girths are seldom mentioned in written records, because they

¹⁷ M. Gradowski, Z. Żygulski (jun.), *op. cit.*, p. 156.

¹⁸ M. Gradowski, Z. Żygulski (jun.), *op. cit.*, p. 156.



Fig. 11. a-b – Saddles depicted in Maciejowski's Bible (www.medievaltimes.com)

were regarded as an inseparable part of a saddle. Nonetheless, they are known to have been referred to as '*cingulum as sellam*' or '*cingulum alias poprag*'¹⁹.

In the system of attaching the saddle, a secondary role was played by a strap termed the breast strap, also referred to as pectoral²⁰, and the breeching. The pectoral ('*antelas*') consisted of a breast strap and two scapula straps. However, medieval representations suggest that the breast strap was not in widespread use at that time and that the pectoral was a kind of loop binding the horse's chest. It was usually attached to the fork or, in the case of the eastern saddle, to the protruding sections of the bars. It may be assumed that in the Early Middle Ages the breast straps were not connected to the saddle but ran behind the cantle, where they were fastened with a buckle (Fig. 11: a-b). The breeching ('*postelas*') consisted of a loop and two fasteners fixed

to the saddle, like in the case of the pectoral. A short strap attached to the lower part of the cantle used for fixing the straps of the breeching and a double vertical slit through which they probably passed is visible in the saddle from the National Museum in Cracow.

The pectoral and breeching were made from leather or textile fibre straps, which were sometimes fantastically shaped (Fig. 9: a-f; Fig. 5: a-b). They were additionally studded or fitted with metal laminae, especially in the places where the leather straps were joined together. Sometimes, loosely hanging ornamental straps, referred to as 'pendent straps', were attached to them, particularly to the breeching (Fig. 9: c-f; Fig. 5: a-b; Fig. 7: b-d)²¹. The ability to make ornamented breast straps was one of the conditions for receiving the title of master in some saddlers' guilds. Thus, an apprentice had to prepare '*dwoje podpiersienie potykane, jedno z mosiądzu, drugie z białymi puklikami z trybowanymi puklamy*' ('two

¹⁹ J. Szymczak, *Ceny broni, koni i oporządzenia jeździeckiego*, [in:] *UwPŚ II*, p. 275.

²⁰ Por.: Gradowski, Żygulski (jun.), *op. cit.*, p. 153.

²¹ J. Szymczak, *Organizacja...*, p. 312.

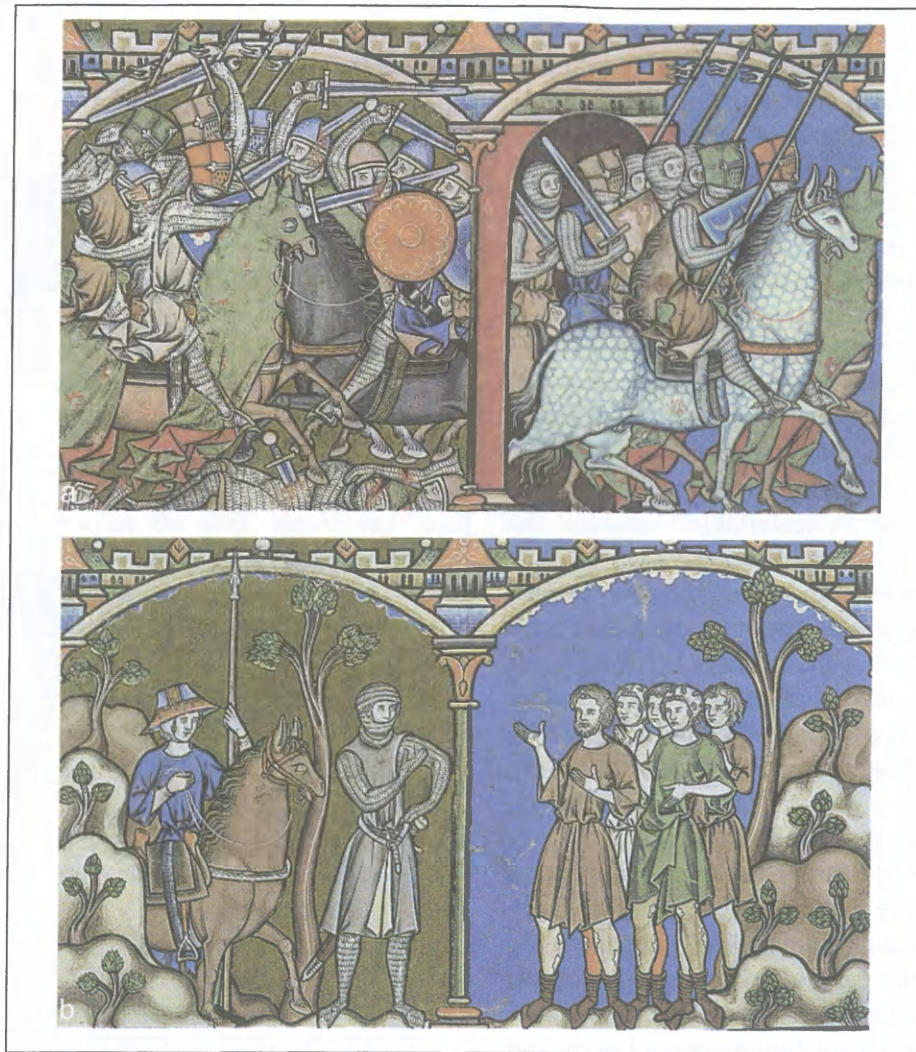


Fig. 12. a-b – Saddles depicted in Maciejowski's Bible (www.medievaltimes.com)

studded breast straps, one made of brass, the other one with white studs with repousse bosses') or '*pectorale alias podpyersche cum fibulis [...] dictis trybowane (repousse)*'²². Breast straps and breechings with the above-mentioned additional components sometimes formed unusually complicated and sublime designs. The richness and great variety of ornamental patterns found on breast straps and breechings suggest that the appearance and lavishness of horse harness were extremely important to medieval cavalymen.

Another component of horse harness was the saddlecloth ('*podclady ad sellas*'), protecting the horse's back from abrasions caused by rubbing and the weight of the bars, fork and cantle (Fig. 12: a; Fig. 11: b). They were mostly textile rectangles or other forms shaped so as to fit the outline of the saddle. Sometimes, also these parts of horse harness were ornamented or decoratively shaped. Saddlecloths were usually placed under the saddle or in some cases thrown

on the seat. The proper identification of saddlecloths used in this way by means of analysis of iconographic sources is very difficult today. It is impossible to establish whether the artist's aim was to depict the saddlecloth, the jockey or the panel of the saddle (Fig. 8: f; Fig. 11: b-c; Fig. 7: a).

The last, though non-constructional, component of a saddle was the stirrup leather, a leather strap suspending stirrups, referred to as '*corrigis ad strepas*', '*cingulis ad strepas*', or '*strzemyenczisko militare*' in written records (Fig. 11: c).²³ Stirrup leathers were fastened to the saddletree by means of special openings hollowed out in the bars (in the case of 'eastern' saddles) or in the fork (in the case of 'western' saddles). Stirrup leathers used in the Middle Ages differed from each other depending on their function. It is difficult to determine the essence of these differences, but a mention of 1475 listing black stirrup leathers used in war and ordinary saddles ('*Strzemyenczyska nigris ad sellas boyowe, et ad alias*)

²² Ibidem, p. 312.

²³ J. Szymczak, *Ceny broni...* (1998), s. 276.

and white ones used by drivers (*'Strzemyenczyska albis ad sellas aurigarum'*) seems to confirm the hypothesis about the presence of such variations²⁴.

Describing the components of a saddle, an interesting detail found in the front plane of the right front arch of the saddle from the national Musum in Cracow should not be omitted. This is a small 'bowl', semicircular in the top view, cm wide and 4 cm in depth. It was once identified as a rest for the lance pole needed when the weapon was held in a vertical position. However, this interpretation can be questioned. The relatively small depth of the 'bowl' and its position result in a situation where after sticking the lance pole in the 'bowl', the warrior would have held it about 1-1.5 m from the end, which would have been uncomfortable because of the uneven distribution of weight. Besides, no analogues of this 'bowl' have been found. Also, the devices used for holding the lance while sitting in the saddle found in surviving saddles from the territory of Europe differ from the one in question. These are mostly leather loops attached to the upper and lower ends of the fork²⁵. The possibility that the mysterious 'bowl' was added later by, for instance, an amateur attempting to 'reconstruct' the saddle cannot be excluded.

It may be assumed that not all saddle components mentioned above were simultaneously present. Probably, their selection and application depended on the rider's personal preference, his actual needs and the practical use of a saddle. Undoubtedly, the richly ornamented saddles were meant for ceremonial occasions and not for everyday situations. On the other hand, the less richly decorated specimens of reinforced construction (for example ones with their forks and cantles overlaid with sheet metal) can be said to have been used in battle. Saddles simple in construction, cheap and practical were suitable for common use.

Surviving written records provide information about a great variety of saddles used in medieval Poland. They mention both available kinds of saddles and the prices. Thus, we have access to a contemporary list of saddles on offer. It may also be noted that ten types of saddle were known as early as 1589²⁶. A harness makers and saddlers' statute of 1504 issued in Poznan lists all the conditions to be fulfilled by a candidate for a guild master. To meet these requirements was not easy as the apprentice had to make four different types of saddle. The first type was referred to as *'sellam militarem cum capite alias heubowane'*, which was a saddle with a tall

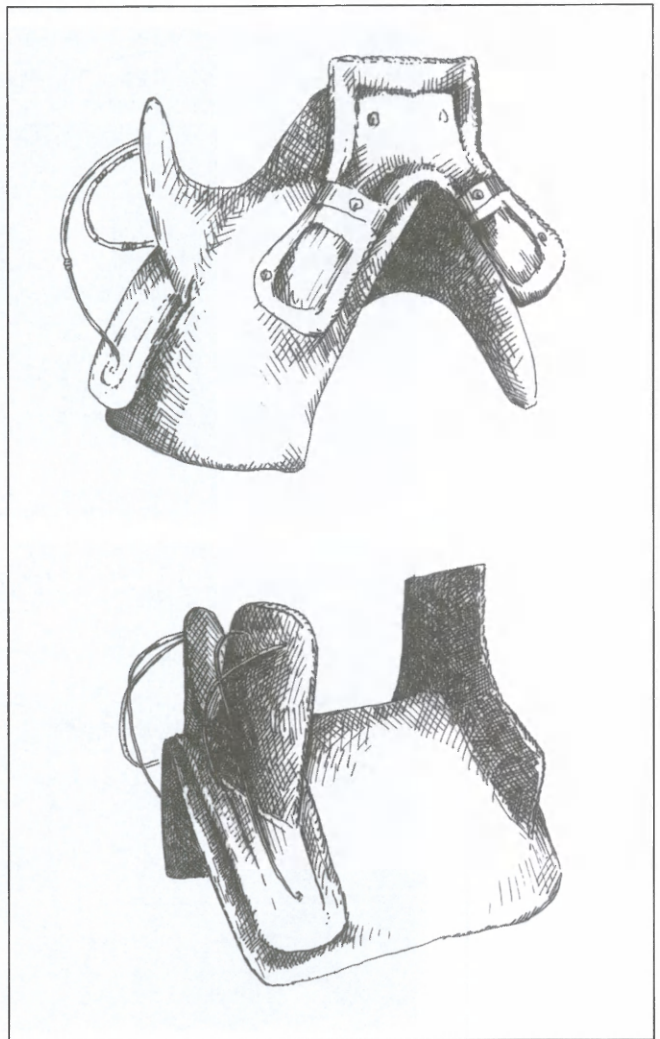


Fig. 13. Saddle from the Polish Army Museum (Drawing by E. Górska)

cantle, possibly a lancer's seat. The other kinds of saddle were as follows: a saddle overlaid with iron (*aliam ferreo circum fabricate*), a saddle with cushions (*cum cussinibus alias kussathel*), and an ordinary saddle (*communis*)²⁷. Other terms were also used to denote a lancer's saddle. Most probably, a saddle of this type was described in a mention of 1474 as a *'boyowe'* (war saddle) *cum rurky*²⁸, as the word *'rurky'* may have denoted the reinforcing bars of the cantle.

In addition, written records allow categorization of 'non-war' saddles meant for everyday use. Such saddles are referred to as *'sells pro curu'*, *'sella communis'*, *'sella civitatis'*, or *'sellis pro cuitate'*²⁹.

The above-mentioned remarks made by the knight de Tornemine regarding the practice of decorating saddles with coloured metals may also refer to Polish

²⁴ Ibidem, p. 276.

²⁵ M. Scalini, *The Armoury of the Castle of Churburg*, Udine 1996, p. 233.

²⁶ J. Szymczak, *Producenci i organizacja produkcji uzbrojenia*, [in:] UWPŚ II (1998), s. 200.

²⁷ J. Szymczak, *Ceny broni...* (1998), p. 274.

²⁸ Ibidem, p. 275.

²⁹ J. Szymczak, *Organizacja...*, p. 320.

knights' expectations. According to written records, Polish saddlers were commissioned to make gilded saddles, saddles plated with silver, overlaid with silver and gilded, or ornamented with horn³⁰. Of course saddles of this type were used for ceremonial purposes and on formal occasions and were unsuitable for the use on the battlefield. It may, however, be assumed that war saddles were also decorated with various motifs. Besides relatively simple designs made from studs arranged in a single line or several rows forming uncomplicated patterns there were saddles with a highly complex system of ornamentation. The saddle depicted in the painting 'Crucifixion' by Giovanni de Almaguita may serve as an example here. It is decorated with floral patterns forming a design covering the fork, cantle, seat and panel (Fig. 2: a)³¹. Ornamental details could be fittings or studs made of less valuable metals. Forks and cantles were sometimes painted or upholstered in colourful fabric. Scenes from the so-called 'Maciejewski's Bible' frequently represent ornamented, multicolour saddles used by knights (Fig. 12: a-b; Fig. 11: a-b). Written sources provide similar information – in 1534, a saddler Szymon ordered '*siodło czerwone wyszite yadwabiem czerwonom hy zielonom*' ('a red saddle embroidered with red and green silk threads')³². Craftsmen of various professions engaged in decoration of saddles. Most of them were goldsmiths, painters, shield makers and sometimes even saddlers themselves³³.

The type of saddle and the materials used as well as the ornamentation determined the price of a specimen. The fact that production of saddles required a number of skills cannot be underestimated. Although Paul of Prague emphasizes that saddlers were connected with craftsmen involved in making woodwork³⁴ and wood was the basic material used for shaping a saddle, a skilful saddler had to be able to work other materials such as leather, fabric and metal too. Therefore, it is little wonder that it took an apprentice several years to learn the skills needed in their job³⁵.

The price range was quite broad. In the majority of cases, a saddle '*cum omnibus attinenciis*', though probably not excessively decorated, was worth over a dozen

grossi³⁶, approximately the price of 1-2 pints of beer³⁷. Sometimes the value of a saddle, a richly ornamented specimen made from the best materials, reached 3-4 marks³⁸. Consequently, it is no wonder that mentions of trials where the defendant maintained that '*Sędziwoj nie ukradł Marciszewi nocną rzecz siodła*' ('Sędziwoj did not steal a saddle from Marciszew at night')³⁹ are frequently mentioned in surviving written records.

The prices of saddles which were specially commissioned to satisfy the needs and individual, sometimes most weird, preferences of the customers must have varied considerably. There were no fixed prices for saddles which '*panowie według swej fantasyei kaza robić sobie*' ('knights ordered to be made following their fantastic instructions')⁴⁰ and for this reason the most demanding customers '*taką robotę płacic mają, iako się z rzemieślnikiem targuje*' ('were expected to bargain with the craftsman over the price of the latter's piece of work')⁴¹.

The fact that saddle components got worn out resulted in the need for repair or replacement. The seats and cushions, forks and cantles, girths and stirrup leathers and even decorative details got damaged. Mentions of repairs on saddles provide information on the cost of such services, which was not exorbitant. It cost a few grossi to repair a saddle as long as no parts made from valuable materials were mended, in which case the total cost could reach even several marks⁴².

In conclusion, regrettably, having at our disposal the hitherto accumulated knowledge, not all questions connected with the use of saddles in medieval Poland can satisfactorily be answered. The large number of types and variations of saddles noticed thanks to analysis of written records and iconographic sources and a simultaneous shortage of corresponding archaeological finds render our researches very difficult. It seems that only a sharp rise in the number of archaeological sources, however improbable, could enrich our knowledge about medieval, Polish war saddles.

Translated by Zuzanna Poklewska-Parra

³⁰ J. Szymczak, *Ceny broni...* (1998), p. 275.

³¹ E. Wagner, Z. Drobna, J. Durdik, *Kroje, zbroj a zbrańe doby předhusitské a husitské*, Praga 1956, part IX, plate 11.

³² J. Szymczak, *Organizacja...*, p. 275.

³³ J. Szymczak, *Producenci...*, p. 181; ; by the same author, *Ceny broni...* (2003), p. 321 – 323.

³⁴ J. Danka, A. Nowakowski, J. Szymczak, *Militaria w „Liber viginti artium” Pawła z Pragi czyli tzw. Księdze Twardowskiego*, „Kwartalnik Historii Kultury Materialnej”, Yearbook 36 (1988), fascicle 1, pp. 52, 57.

³⁵ J. Szymczak, *Organizacja...*, p. 319.

³⁶ J. Szymczak, *Producenci...*, p. 274 - 276.

³⁷ J. Szymczak, *Organizacja*, p. 342

³⁸ Ibidem, p. 321.

³⁹ *Wielkopolskie rotty sądowe XIV–XV wieku*, vol. 3, *Roty kościańskie*, ed. H. Kowalewicz, W. Kuraszkiewicz, Wrocław – Warszawa – Kraków 1967, p. 271, no. 626 (36v).

⁴⁰ J. Szymczak, *Ceny broni...* (2003), p. 279.

⁴¹ J. Szymczak, *Ceny broni...* (2003), p. 279.

⁴² J. Szymczak, *Organizacja...*, p. 324.

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